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## FAITH ACCORDING TO PAUL

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The gospel of Paul is a gospel of redemption. The cross, as the consummate expression of God's reconciling love, is the central pillar around which the structure of the apostle's thought is built. There is a sense in which we may speak of a "finished work" of Christ, a reconciliation once for all achieved and not merely in process of achievement. As Professor Denney remarks in his able study of *The Death of Christ*:

The work of reconciliation is not a work wrought upon the souls of men, though it is a work wrought in their interests, and bearing so directly upon them that we can say that God has reconciled the world to himself; it is a work—as Cromwell said of the covenant—*outside of us*, in which God so deals in Christ with the sin of the world that it shall no longer be a barrier between himself and men.<sup>1</sup>

Admitting a certain relative validity in this view of the matter, reflection compels us to the conclusion that it is abstract and unreal of itself, a fragmentary and partial aspect of a larger and more adequate mode of apprehension.

The truth is, redemption is liable to lead to all kinds of unsubstantial theological notions, when taken out of the region of spiritual experience. The atonement is not atonement until it finds a response and consummation in the heart and conscience of man. The divine transaction achieved without us hangs in the air, unrealized and unintelligible, until it has become a process of our spiritual experience. "So long as Christ is outside of us," says Calvin, "and we are separated from him, whatever he has suffered and done for humanity is useless and without significance for us." Hence Paul, unlike some of his scholastic interpreters, labors to hold in an indissoluble unity the subjective and objective elements in the atoning process, and thereby to reflect in thought spiritual reality as it is. Now, the sub-

<sup>1</sup> P. 145.

jective element, with which alone this paper is concerned, is faith. It is by faith that we assimilate and consummate Christ's redemptive work. It is by faith that the great moments of his atoning history find, as it were, an echo, a response, in the self-denial, the crucifixion, the spiritual mortification which are the marks of the Christian life.

Central as is the position which faith occupies in Paul's theology, it involved a conception too rich and spiritually complex to receive adequate recognition in later ecclesiastical doctrine. Partly through the incursion of Greek philosophy, especially as seen in the work of the Apologists, who were prone to think of Christianity as a philosophy resting on revelation, and of revelation as a formulated doctrinal system; partly through the various secularizing influences of pagan custom and cultus on the belief and worship of the church, faith was stripped of its lofty spiritual predicates until, as in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, it becomes a purely intellectual act, an assent of the will to a dogmatic system imposed by an external authority. If, then, we would understand what the apostle has to say to us, we must go behind the dogmatic systems to the original sources, and try to gather into one the scattered reflections that bear upon the question.

Paul nowhere defines faith, but his doctrine, generally considered, resembles that of the Jewish Alexandrian school, which held it to be "the queen of virtues," "the only and undeceiving good, the consolation of life, the possession of happiness," and which made it consist of an assured conviction higher than that produced by sense or reason. But it is not to Philo that he owes his doctrine. It may be doubted whether he ever read one of the great Alexandrian's books. Not even from the book of which he was master, the Old Testament, did he derive his splendid conception. No doubt he found the word *πίστις* in his Greek Bible, but with what ethical power, emotional passion, and mystical rapture has he changed it, at once transforming and transfiguring the thought that it expresses! Nowhere is his spiritual creativeness more apparent than here. He takes this word and makes it the vehicle at once of advanced knowledge (*ἐπίγνωσις*) that grasps by a mental act unseen realities, of emotional energy that works by love, of moral intuition that sees in the hardest duty its sovereign obligation. The originality of his doctrine is as unquestionable as its breadth and inwardness.

We may pass by the secondary and looser applications of the word and fasten on the meaning which touches the highest reaches of the apostle's thinking. The essence of faith is absolute trust in, enthusiastic loyalty and devotion of heart to, Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. There is a formal difference between our Lord's teaching here and that of his great disciple. For the Master, faith means absolute trust in God's fatherly goodness, whereby a man rises above all outward and inward impediments and achieves dominion over the forces of evil.<sup>2</sup> For the apostle, faith in God was synonymous with faith in Christ. It was Christ who made faith in the divine fatherhood possible and evoked it in the hearts of men. The ultimate object of faith, and the organ or instrument by which faith was aroused, became identified in Paul's thought, so that he could speak indifferently of faith having for its object the God "who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,"<sup>3</sup> or Christ in his character as Savior dying for man,<sup>4</sup> or simply the resurrection of Christ, because that event was the divine imprimatur on his work and the strongest proof that he who died upon the cross preserved through death his divine sonship.<sup>5</sup> How remote all this is from the later ecclesiastical notion, set forth anew in our time in the writings of Cardinal Newman, that the correlative of faith is dogma as attested by divine authority, and communicated to the world by means of an official hierarchy. Submission of the intellect to authority misses the very nerve of Paul's teaching, which in its highest form always emphasizes passionate self-surrender to a person. Nor again does the apostle give any countenance to the idea of modern evangelism—a survival of seventeenth-century scholasticism—which robs faith of all moral content and reduces it to the conviction that Christ died for our sins and underwent the doom of guilt in our room and stead. How could he deny to faith all moral value and at the same time contend that it is the root of all genuine morality? If faith is not the meritorious cause of divine forgiveness, it is for the apostle its ethical *sine qua non*, and as such must be morally excellent. It is no "bare hand laying hold of Christ," no assent to a proposition in divinity, but a moral self-committal, a whole-hearted submission to the claims of a Higher and a Holier.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 17:20; Mark 9:23; Luke 17:6.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 4:24.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. 2:20.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 15:14 f.

It is this faith that brings the Christian inside the region where may be enjoyed the privileges and rights created by the work of Christ. As a member of the community of which the Crucified One is Lord, he obtains a share in the righteousness which belongs to the community as a whole. This righteousness is reckoned or imparted to the individual, because first reckoned or imparted to the church. As is well known, we owe to the genius of Albrecht Ritschl the resurrection of this forgotten thought, which forms a counterpoise to the one-sided individualism that characterized the Reformation teaching. "The forgiveness of sins," he remarks, "as the fundamental condition of the Christian community is appropriated by the individual within the community."<sup>6</sup> Just as the old covenant is between God and Israel as a nation, a community, so the new covenant is between God and the society of believers gathered out of the world. Ideally and historically the church is prior to the individual believer: it is through its message and its discipline that men realize the forgiveness of sins. Faith is the act of the individual by which the divine deed of forgiveness or justification becomes in his case realized. Hence faith is said to justify.

"Justification by faith" was a hard saying to the men of Paul's day; it is no less hard to the modern mind; for it seems to represent God as indifferent to conduct, as substituting a state or act of mind for the result of a life of virtuous acts. But in reality it is because conduct is of such vital importance before God that the apostle, feeling his utter inability to stand the scrutiny of the divine eye as it searches through and through his moral achievements, is driven from the ground of doing to some other on which he can be reconciled to God. That other is faith. By faith a man is justified; that is, his sin is treated as non-existent. As Ritschl says: "God justifies not by an 'analytic' but by a 'synthetic' judgment." The justifying act gives sinful men the right to enter into communion with God and to become citizens of his kingdom in spite of their consciousness of guilt. And the subjective appropriation of this act is expressed by the word "faith." Hence Paul saw in faith the best guarantee of ethical interests. As long as he stood on the ground of merit, his relations

<sup>6</sup> *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, sec. 38; cf. *Justification and Reconciliation* (English translation), p. 108-14. Ritschl cites as proof-texts, Rom. 8:32; 3:22; Eph. 5:25; Titus 2:14.

with God could never be other than those of debtor and creditor, and his morality was doomed to take its color from those relations; to be, therefore, cold, calculating, scrupulous, mechanical. What he hungered for was immediateness of access to God, the release of some overwhelming emotion that should sweep off and away doubts, fears, peccancies, petty anxieties, and overstrained scrupulosities, and make obedience the glad homage of his heart to its rightful Lord. This he found in faith. Faith is neither a substitute for conduct, nor an arbitrary condition of Christian living—mistakes into which a crude theology falls—but simply the latent instinct of sonship awakened by Christ to self-consciousness.

It is the disclosure to the self of its own vital secret; it is the thrill of our inherent childhood, as it makes itself felt within the central recesses of the life; it is the flame which shoots into consciousness at the recognition of the touch of our divine fatherhood.<sup>7</sup>

But we have not yet compassed the wealth of the Pauline conception. Faith, which incorporates the Christian into the justified community, at the same time incorporates him in Christ, the Head and Lord of the community as the vital element in which henceforth he lives and moves and has his being. Hence the apostle uses language which describes a spiritual union of the closest kind—a fusion, as it were, of two personalities, the human and the divine. When we strip his thought of metaphor, what he means is that faith in Christ implies identification of our will with Christ's will. He can say: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me."<sup>8</sup> "To me to live is Christ."<sup>9</sup> And his favorite formula is: "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus." To most men, impoverished as they are in moral imagination, such words sound unreal, the expression of an overstrained emotionalism. The average man, when he comes across such sayings, recalls the remark of Huxley that "Paul was a queer person," and deems this judgment a sufficient explanation. And yet the apostle's doctrine is only the effort to formulate his own experience. From that consecrated hour when God revealed his Son in him, he was conscious of such an absorbing devotion; of such a transport of joy and love, that Christ filled his whole horizon; constituted, so to say, his universe. His "only hate" had been suddenly transformed into his "only love,"

<sup>7</sup> H. S. Holland in *Lux Mundi*, p. 15.    <sup>8</sup> Gal. 2:20.    <sup>9</sup> Phil. 1:21.

and, in virtue of the mighty reaction then experienced, he scaled grander heights of spiritual emotion than was possible to men whose transition to the new faith had been normal and gradual. So close was this union with Christ that the great redemptive deeds of the Savior were reproduced as inward events of his own soul. Did Christ die? Then by faith Paul died ethically to his old order of life. Did Christ rise again? Then Paul rose in him to a new mode of existence.

Christ's death and resurrection are in themselves bare external facts of history; but as soon as they are seen to symbolize a great law—the law, namely, that man must die to his old natural *ego* that he may live in his higher and better self—they are clothed with spiritual power, and are revealed as present and potent factors in the redemption of humanity. It is true, indeed, that Christ's death and resurrection are for the apostle outward physical events, and that the death and resurrection to which the Christian is called are ethical and inward. Yet faith laying hold of Christ finds in every crisis of his earthly history a type or parable of the spiritual life. If he so loved man as to identify himself with all man's sin and misery, to live man's life and die man's death, it follows that the believing man will yearn to identify himself inwardly with Christ in the critical moments of his redeeming work. Love cannot tolerate the evil that has flung its shadow on the loved. Within its deepest life it will rear a bloody cross, and there slay and cast out the flesh with its affections and lusts, if only it may gain an utter oneness with the Crucified. For a fresh and vivid appreciation of this side of Paul's theology we are indebted to men whose point of view is by no means that of orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup> Yet it is hard to make Paul speak the language of Hegel. Says the master of Balliol:

In the death of Christ, as seen in the light of his resurrection, St. Paul found a kind of illustrated epitome, a condensed picture, which showed as by a flash of lightning the principle and meaning of the whole divinely appointed order of the world. The simple intuition of Jesus that "he who would save his life must lose it" was, in the first place, projected into the form of an outward event, as the history of a Messiah who died to rise again; and then, in the second place, it was reinterpreted, as the great moral law of the

<sup>10</sup> T. H. Green, *Works*, Vol. III, p. 230; E. Caird, *Evolution of Religion*, Vol. II, pp. 198–203; O. Pfleiderer, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 53–60.

life of man. It is true, there was some loss in this process, which first externalized the law of life as a great divine tragedy, from which the same law in its deeper spiritual sense was afterward gathered as an influence.<sup>11</sup>

Paul, then, it would appear, has obscured the truth which modern philosophy would emphasize, that the idea of dying to sin and rising again to righteousness, while it had its historic framework in the story of Christ's work, yet is itself quite separable from that story, and is independently and universally valid. But, in the first place, Paul did not create the belief that Christ died for the sins of men and rose again; he shared it with the primitive community. Did, then, the early disciples create the idea? Or must we not say that they lean on the teaching of Christ himself that his death was in some sense a "ransom" for the souls of men; that it was not merely an illustration of the maxim "Die to live," but the basis of a new relation between God and man? And, in the second place, we must insist that the peculiar glory of Christianity is not that it introduced a moral idea before unknown, but that it gifted the soul with power to realize ideas which it already acknowledged. Men knew well that they ought to die to the lower life and rise to the higher; but they were unable to translate the idea into fact. Four centuries before Christ's day a Greek poet voiced this bitter truth:

Oft have I lain awake at night and thought  
 Whence came the evils of this mortal life.  
 And my creed is that not thro' lack of wit  
 Men go astray, for most of them have sense  
 Sufficient, but that we must look elsewhere.  
 Discourse of reason tells us what is right,  
 But we fall short in action.<sup>12</sup>

"We fall short in action!" Such is the melancholy cry. The great moral idea was but a picture painted in the clouds. In Christ it took to itself hands and feet, entered human history, and planted itself amid the realities of the world's life. All through the Christian centuries men have felt, with whatever intellectual crudeness, with whatever poverty of expression, that in Christ's death their old selfish life has been killed, that in "the power of his resurrection" they have been enabled to live a new life. In other words, his death has been

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 200.

<sup>12</sup> Euripides, *Hippolytus*. (G. Smith's translation.)



in them the producing cause of a sense of reconciliation with God; that is, to recur to the metaphor, an ethical death to the old life, and an ethical resurrection to the new. As Harnack remarks:

Christianity is the religion of redemption, because it is the religion of forgiveness. . . . The deepest and most earnest Christians embrace Jesus Christ, not only as Prophet, but as Reconciler.<sup>13</sup>

If we are, then, to take the Christian consciousness as our guide, Paul must be acquitted of the charge of misunderstanding the meaning of Christ's death and its relation to faith. Rather must we say that he seeks to set that meaning in the clear light of a coherent doctrine of man's spiritual nature—that nature which through sin has fallen into a miserable dualism, but which through faith in Christ as Redeemer recovers the aboriginal principle of spiritual unity.

<sup>13</sup> Essay in *Atonement and Religious Thought*, p. 124.